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THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN ENGLAND.

THERE are periods of calm when the waters of the political sea are so placid that the captain and the crew who man the Ship of State need not be men of extraordinary ability. In fact, she almost seems to drift, with wind and tide as her only pilot and helmsman. But when the tempests lash the sea into fury, when the cross currents almost cause the ship to part in the middle, when sudden seismic forces cause reefs to rise in front and on either side, so that the chart no longer furnishes an adequate guide, then it is that the situation renders imperative the need of a great man.

This situation is present to-day on the sea of English politics. For some years England has experienced a lack of a definite, firm foreign policy; hers has rather been one of *drift*, which had cost her a decided loss of prestige in the Orient even before the mistakes which precipitated the Boer War. As a result she finds her influence no longer dominant in the far East, which was the case a decade ago, and in the near East her influence is scarcely felt at all. The war has forced upon them a consideration of the question of taxation, and upon this rock the government has split. Under these circumstances a national leader who could cement the warring factions at home and make the will of the nation felt and respected abroad would be worth far more to his country than many an army corps or ironclad.

That we may the better understand the difficulties of the situation, a brief retrospect and a careful view of the factors in the present crisis are necessary. Ten years ago English influence was the supreme influence of the Orient politically and commercially. But as a result of the vacillating policy of England during and at the close of the Chino-Japanese War her political supremacy passed to Russia. In the language of the Stock Exchange, the diplomatic market in the far East suddenly changed from "Bullish" to "Bearish." Had Eng-

lish affairs at that time been in the hands of real statesmen, Japan might then have been saved the humiliation due to being robbed of the fruits of her victory, and China the perpetual menace to her safety resultant upon the possession of Manchuria by Russia. Unfortunately for the world, England played a weak hand just at the time when the game demanded her highest cards. As a consequence of this misplay the balance of power in the Orient was so disturbed that a war has been necessary to restore the equilibrium.

In Persia there has been an almost equal gain of prestige by Russia, and, as in the Far East, the gain has been at the expense of England. Nor has the change been due to natural causes, but rather to a lack of farsighted statesmanship upon the part of England. The cause of the change is not far to seek. England refused to make a loan to the Persian government; Persia turned to Russia, and, although she was in a far worse condition financially than England, she hesitated not a moment about furnishing the money, even though she had to borrow the whole amount in order to accommodate her neighbor. From that point on Russian and not English influence was dominant at the Persian Court, and as a result the railway and industrial concessions have gone to Russia and not to England. Within a comparatively short time Northern Persia has become a sphere for Russian exploitation, and the Muscovite is pressing hard toward the Persian Gulf, an outlet upon which would be an additional menace to British control of India.

In the near East English influence has come to be an almost negligible quantity. Here she has been supplanted by Germany, whose advice and wares are in far greater demand in most parts of the Turkish Empire than are those of Downing Street and Birmingham. True, while the *status quo* can be maintained in the near East, the safety of the British Empire is not threatened by this shifting of the honor attached to being the right-hand man of the Sultan. But if Germany and Russia should agree upon a dismemberment of the Turkish Empire—in which case Germany would take Asiatic Turkey, and Russia would claim her long-looked-for

heritage upon the Bosphorus—then the British lines of communication with India would be seriously threatened. And whatever threatens the British line of communication with India touches England at a point where the nerves are especially sensitive and near the surface.

Thus there has been a loss of English prestige all along the line not because the nation has suddenly become weak or degenerate but because of a lack of statesmanship. Yet the immediate cause of the present crisis is not a question of foreign policy, but of domestic politics. The Boer War has thrown the British Cabinet into a panic over two questions: (1) How can the expenses incident to thrashing the Boers be most easily defrayed? and (2) how can a fiscal system be so devised as to knit the various parts of the empire more closely together, and at the same time further the interests of English commerce?

The first of these questions is a natural heritage of war; the second, of imperialism. If, in a moral sense, it is true that "the trail of an army is the trail of a serpent," the same is no less true in a financial sense. For a government to raise money during the excitement of a war is a relatively easy matter for a proud and patriotic nation. While the war lasts the safety of the nation overbears everything else, and the burden of taxes is little felt. It is when all danger is past that a reaction sets in, and the wisdom of the party necessitating the expenditure is subjected to criticism. The ability to meet this criticism successfully, to retain the confidence and good will of the people while compelling them to pay for a past luxury, is one of the severe tests of statesmanship. It is in this balance that the leaders of the Conservative party are being "weighed and found wanting." Were the Conservative leaders united in their opinion as to the most practicable method of raising the requisite amount, their party would stand a far better chance of being able to weather the storm. But they are not. Some of them favor one plan, and some another. Under such circumstances it is not at all strange that the party should fail to retain the allegiance of the people. In order that men may have

confidence in the judgment of a party, it is necessary that its leaders should have confidence in each other.

The strongest man in the Conservative party, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, has endeavored to answer both questions by advocating a resort to protection. But in order to make the exotic weed smell like a native rose he gives to it the scientific name *Coloniale differentiale*. But those blunt, beef-eating Englishmen refuse to be deceived by any such phraseological trick. With them the logic of facts is more conclusive than the logic of words. They know, and their knowledge is born of experience, that a manufacturing nation cannot afford to adopt a fiscal policy which will enhance the price of food and raw materials. Mr. Chamberlain is, therefore, forced to fight not merely prejudice and conservatism but the conquering force of economic laws. Against such odds the fight is at best an uneven one, and naught but superior leadership can win it. However much partisans may strive by the use of analogies to prove this or that theory, the fact is that a fiscal policy is not a coat to be cut according to foreign patterns, but according to the cloth and the needs of the wearer.

But at present the Liberal party shows very little signs of being able to avail itself of the opportunity offered it by the rift in the ranks of its opponents. The Liberals are also without a leader who is equal to the occasion. Lord Rosebery is a scholarly and cultured gentleman, who would grace a chair in a university, but he is not a statesman. Sir William Vernon Harcourt is a man of recognized ability, but is lacking in the qualities of a political leader. The Earl of Spencer, upon whom it is said Mr. Gladstone wished his mantle to fall, is a man of no mean ability, and possesses many qualities which appeal forcibly to the average Englishman, but he also is wanting in that vigor of mind and clearness of vision which is indispensable to successful leadership of a great nation at the present time. Should the Liberal party be in the ascendant in the House of Commons, the Earl of Spencer would very likely be named by the King as the next Premier, notwithstanding that his age is something of a disqualification. A man of his age and temperament would be a safe man for the head of a

cabinet in ordinary times; but this is no ordinary time. Never was there a period in the history of English politics when the situation demanded a greater statesman than to-day.

The problem pressing upon English statesmen for solution is no less than that of the reconstruction of Africa and the restoration of the equilibrium in Asia. These are questions which far transcend in importance any fiscal question. They mean much to all who are interested in the progress and civilization of the world. For it cannot be denied that England has played no mean part in the advancement of mankind; that progress and constitutional liberty would suffer a severe check by the permanent transcendancy of Russia over England in Asia, or of France over England in Africa. Whatever may be thought of the motives and the methods of England, the results of her triumphs have accorded better with the political and scientific, the ethical and educational development of mankind than have those of any other nation, except the United States. It is therefore not a matter of indifference to the world, and certainly is one of vital import to England, that the present necessities of the political situation should develop a leader worthy of the opportunity presented. Whatever the outcome, the situation is worthy of careful study.

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